Essentials for the professional

Outdoor Program Administration

Principles and Practices

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Geoff Harrison • Mat Erpelding
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Chapter 12

Developing Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines for Outdoor Programs

Mat Erpelding, MA, Curt Howell, MA, and Brien Sheedy, MA

Outdoor program administrators often work within a department of a larger organization. This means administrators inherit sets of policies, procedures, and guidelines that they must follow to operate in consistency with the

larger organization. At the same time, administrators must develop and write policies, procedures, and guidelines specific to their outdoor programs. Thus the ability to effectively develop policies, procedures, and guidelines depends on both the outdoor program administrator's detailed understanding of administrative practices and his or her overall responsibilities to the program and organization. As discussed in chapter 6, risk management is not limited to preventing and accommodating accidents that occur while in the field; rather, it is an overarching big-picture perspective on effectively avoiding and mitigating loss to enhance participant experiences and maintain a professional organization. Designing policies, procedures, and guidelines requires an ability to write clear, concise, and useful information for staff to use and follow while working for the program. This might range from procedures prescribing how to answer phones and engage customers, to guidelines on how to use a repair kit in the field. *Policies* represent the "rules" governing the organization and its employees. *Procedures* are the process by which a policy is implemented. Policies need to be relatively consistent over time, but the procedures through which a policy is implemented may change based on technological advancements, development of new tools and resources, curricular developments, or risks associated with the activity

that require a procedural shift. *Guidelines* are generally accepted practices or options written to aid and support staff in making decisions. They are sometimes referred to as SOPs (standard operating procedures) or AFPs (accepted field practices) and are not as rigid as policies. Guidelines allow staff the freedom to make appropriate judgment calls based on an immediate situation, but they must have sound justification for opting to act or proceed in opposition to the guidelines. Policies, procedures, and guidelines can generally be found by an employee in an organization's staff manual or handbook. Depending on the format of the manual, it may serve as a reference tool for trip leaders working in the field.

In this chapter we focus on developing effective policies, procedures, and guidelines for field practices, such as a trips program, challenge course, or special events. For our purposes here, three important sets of policies are discussed: administrative, incident prevention, and incident response. Consistent with one of the major themes of this text, assessment also serves a vital function in the development of an organization's policies, procedures, and guidelines. Attention is given in this chapter to certain aspects of program assessment that facilitate the development of appropriate policies.

CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITY POLICY, PROCE- DURE, AND GUIDELINE DOCUMENTS

In cases in which a policy does not require procedural directions, guidelines indicating best practices may be used to provide competent staff with the responsibility of enforcing a policy, but allowing the freedom to make procedural adjustments as needed. Appropriate policies rely on the ability of the outdoor program administrator to accurately determine the probable context of the policy application. As discussed in chapter 6, administrative risk management establishes context as a starting point for risk management, and this should remain consistent when considering policies. Depth, necessity, and design may vary based on location, emergency access, and accepted practices. The following are general considera- tions for an administrator when writing policies, procedures, and guidelines.

Policy Clarity

Although outdoor programs must design unique protocols to match specific types of pro-

gramming, there are some common characteristics that underlie their composition. First and perhaps foremost, policies and procedures should be stated as simply as possible to minimize interpretation errors. Here's an example:

Policy

- All participants and leaders must wear a seat belt while driving or riding in vehicles owned or operated by the organization.

Procedure

- Prior to starting the vehicle, the leader must explain that seatbelts are mandatory for everyone's safety.

- Perform a visual check to see if everyone is wearing a seat belt.

- Ask all participants to confirm that they will wear a seatbelt at all times when the vehicle is in motion.

As detailed in the example, policies, procedures, and guidelines need to minimize potential for misinterpretation. Each policy should be written as concisely as possible. An ambiguous policy creates opportunities for broad interpretations, some of them likely inaccurate. Policy clarity depends on the staff training and assessment model employed by the administrator. Policies need to be reviewed by all staff in a forum with opportunity for questions,

especially in the context of field leadership. Merely supplying staff with a manual does not ensure that they understand the contents. Administrators are encouraged to check for understanding through question-and-answer sessions or even written tests if deemed necessary.

If a program includes a vehicle, then the program administrator needs to develop policies related to the use of the vehicle.

Policy Consistency

Consistency is a key concept to keep in mind, especially for safety presentations and risk-prevention topics. The outdoor program administrator carefully weighs a policy to ensure that it remains a largely positive benefit to the organization. A common area of discussion is

how much to document. Some administrators argue to keep things vague and minimize how much is printed to avoid unforeseeable policy violations that may put the organization at risk for litigation. Others argue to focus on what is in the best interest of participants. However, these decisions will be influenced largely by the size of your organization. Typically, the larger the company or organization, the greater the need for written policies, procedures, and guidelines to ensure consistency among staff members. Although instructor delivery methods may differ, there should be consistency on what is presented and the content within each topic. Thus important questions to ask are, Are all staff members conducting safety presentations and handling risk in a consistent fashion? and Will the policy address a majority of the contextual variations that leaders or guides will encounter in the field? If contextual variations might create inconsistent applications of the policy, it is best to write guidelines that can be applied in multiple situations.

Consider the discussion in <u>chapter 7</u> indicating that once a program writes policies and incorporates those policies into a risk-management plan, failure to adhere to the policies may become evidence of negligence. Thus policies need to be both consistently and easily enforced.

Ease of Access

To promote consistent use, policies and procedures should be easy to access and reference by staff in the event that a policy question occurs, be it in the office or at a trailhead. As with many other aspects of a quality risk-management approach, policies, procedures, and guidelines have positive and negative implications. Table 12.1 details the benefits and drawbacks of policies and procedures. Organizations that are large or that have many volunteer leaders and a less-skilled staff will find the need to rely more on staff manuals. Conversely, small organizations with just a few highly trained staff may not need comprehensive written manuals because critical information is being relayed verbally, staff members have appropriate experience and judgment to manage situations that arise, and the outdoor program administrator is regularly able to assess the staff.

In the office, a three-ring binder is very easy to open when considering a refund policy for a customer. However, weight, ease of access, usability, and contextual considerations need to be taken into account when designing field manuals that detail policies, procedures, and guidelines. In some cases, policies might be memorized, and in others a waterproof staff

manual might be called for. Sometimes tools such as safety talk checklists (cheat sheets) are made on small laminated cards that leaders can stick in a PFD or pocket. Regardless of the method used, policies, procedures, and guidelines must be easily referenced or remembered when situations require a decision regarding a policy.

Table 12.1 Positives and Negatives of Policies and Procedures

Positive outcomes	Negative outcomes
Clearly defines expectations	Possible misinterpretation
Consistent application by staff	Increased need for training
Establishes a minimum expectation	Enforcement problems
Provides appropriate flexibility	Legal concerns if policies are not followed
Legal defensibility	Decreased perception of staff flexibility
Higher program quality	Time consuming

Sustainability and Cost Effectiveness

Even well-written policies, procedures, and guidelines will need to be rewritten as the context for which they were written changes. However, a quality policy and procedure manual should remain generally consistent over time. In an office environment, a searchable document located online will save printing costs, support environmental considerations, and readily accommodate policy changes. However, in field-based situations, technology may not be as readily available, so traditional paper manuals are still commonly used. An effective staff

manual might include the following information: the organization's mission, vision, and goals; incident-prevention policies, procedures, or guidelines; and an overarching incident-response plan. Thus the staff manual can serve as a regularly accessed tool for field staff personnel.

Staff should also be well versed in how to search, apply, and reference policies and procedures. Staff-training progressions must include administrative tasks such as learning outdoor program policies, procedures, and guidelines to ensure consistent application by staff.

Responsiveness

Policies, procedures, and guidelines should respond to the needs of the staff and administration. Responsiveness refers to the time it takes to adapt, change, or update outdated or irrelevant policies within an organization. For example, an incident-response plan that has a specific calling procedure needs to be updated regularly with current assigned contacts and their phone numbers. Many times, a policy is implemented but is only reviewed when it is needed. This "just in time" method is a poor administrative approach. Responsive reviews should occur regularly in all aspects of a program to identify areas for improvement before they are needed. Being proactive and regularly assessing

and reviewing policies and procedures not only ensures accurate up-to-date information but also contributes to a culture of safety and professionalism.

Accountability

Policies, procedures, and guidelines create a system of governance for staff members. Clearly written and concise policies coupled with appropriate staff trainings must be provided by management to ensure consistent application of policies, procedures, and guidelines. The consequences of inappropriate actions or inactions should be clearly expressed in a policy manual (e.g., ranging from minor to major: loss of employee propurchase privileges, loss of employee discounts, reduction of hours, demotion to a lower level of responsibility, suspension, and ultimately termination of employment or contract). An expression of clear, concise, and complete consequences is particularly important when enforcing policies and procedures that promote the safety and security of staff and participants.

In summary, policies, procedures, and guidelines are essential to effective management of an organization. Regardless of the context, whether administrative, incident prevention, or incident response, the general characteristics should include ease of access, cost effectiveness,

responsiveness, and accountability to reach maximum effectiveness.

CONSIDERATIONS SPECIFIC TO DEVELOPING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Policies and procedures are specific to each organization. Because of the variability in mission statements, program purpose, staff abilities, and course locations, writing policies and procedures is no easy task. Though variation exists among programs, there are common considerations essential to the development of program policies, procedures, and guidelines. Once program goals have been established, an administrator's work continues in developing comprehensive assessments of locations, equipment needs, and ultimately the participants who will be served in a particular program. Further, staff trainings must be developed along with program progressions for continual staff development as well as progressions for the various programs. As noted in chapter 1, the integration of outdoor, human, educational, and management skills is crucial to maintaining a balanced program; this integration helps define the policies needed to maintain a professional

and well-managed program. A successful program continually evaluates the effective application of each of these skills, making changes as necessary (Nicolazzo, 2007). Statements such as, "Things are going pretty well, but how can we continue to improve?" are indicative of dynamic program cultures that emphasize continual growth and adaptation. This sort of administrative mindset often avoids complacency, thereby maintaining rich and forward-thinking programming. In the following sections we address general location, equipment, and participant assessments necessary for the development of policies and procedures for program activities. We also provide considerations for staff training and discussion on the nature and value of feedback to program growth. These are necessary assessments conducted prior to customizing policies and procedures for a program regardless of program type (e.g., challenge course, land-based, water-based, special events, etc.).

Location Assessments

A thorough knowledge of the prospective locations an outdoor program administrator intends to use is key to organizing for successful programming. Location assessments might involve phone calls to land managers, guidebook consultation, discussions with other users of a

location, online resources, and scouting trips. Of these, scouting trips are often the most informative for the development of accurate trip itineraries and risk-management plans, as well as for developing appropriate policies and procedures. However, the time and resources invested in scouting trips should be weighed against program objectives, current interest, and financial resources. If an organization is having a tough time finding participants for an Introduction to Rock Climbing program, then doing a reconnaissance trip to scout out some fabulous multipitch sport climbing at a "shot in the dark" activity location such as El Portrero Chico, Mexico, might not be the best use of program resources.

In general, programs often use only a select number of activity locations that have been designated appropriate for specific activities by the administration. As indicated, much time and expense can be invested on location assessments to gather pertinent information from which site-specific policies, procedures, and guidelines can be written. However, an intentional visit can provide a wealth of vital information that allows administrators to design quality programs and trips, increase effectiveness of risk management through accurate incident-prevention strategies, and write informed incident-response plans. Often administrators visit new locations themselves or send competent senior staff to lead

scouting trips in an effort to broaden and invigorate the offerings of a program trip. Location assessments occur before, during, and after trips to develop a comprehensive and current understanding of the specific opportunities, challenges, and hazards of each location selected for a program. Creating and maintaining a venue guide for each location helps administrators keep record of these details. A *venue guide* is an organized compilation of data, such as the location features, potential activities, applicable maps, emergency action plans (EAPs), driving directions, routes to nearest hospitals, gas stations, local weather averages, and other pertinent information regarding a location that might be useful while planning or leading a trip. Figure 12.1 is a list of items that might be included in general location assessments.

Equipment Assessments and Use Policies

Because of the need to provide appropriate and safe equipment for participants, the selection, care, and use of specialized equipment is critically important to an outdoor program. New technology has allowed manufacturers to develop sophisticated equipment that is both lighter and more reliable than previous generations of

equipment. For an administrator, purchasing decisions are typically based on the goals, needs, and resources of the program. New gear choices can be overwhelming to sift through because many of the new features of equipment do not reflect advances in technology and function but rather marketing hype to promote the sale of the product. Further, the addition of gender marketed items such as sleeping bags and backpacks designed specifically for women is helpful for increasing the comfort of participants, but administrators must now consider the costs associated with increasing inventory to provide this option. The issue of personal gear use during program activities should also be considered because it can represent a safety liability for both individual participants and the group as a whole. Administrators must decide what equipment can be provided by participants and what should be provided by the program. Personal items such as climbing shoes and sleeping bags are likely less of a safety issue than items such as climbing ropes, harnesses, and carabiners.

Figure 12.1 General Location Assessment

- Appropriateness for the intended activities and goals of the program
- Regulations and permitting (see chapter 10)

- Land manager contact information
- Frequency of use and high-impact seasons
- Hazard evaluation with respect to intended activities
- Evacuation options
- Driving directions (including to hospital)
- Water sources
- Local weather
- Camping and parking options
- Associated use fees
- Emergency contact information for search and rescue and police
- Recommended guidebooks
- Recommended maps
- Specific environmental impact considerations
- Specific technical skill considerations

Additionally, administrators must regularly purchase equipment to replace damaged items, add to inventory, or replenish gear selected for sale. Developing policies regarding equipment inspection and reporting is necessary to ensure quality equipment remains in use and old or damaged equipment is removed from inventory. In choosing equipment for any program, administrators must consider which items the program will provide for effective facilitation of the intended activities. Networking with other programs can give an administrator valuable

insight on available equipment options and which manufacturers are offering program-specific products.

Finally, equipment logs are useful for tracking inventory, repairs, and use. Having the purchase date and dates of repair documented is helpful when deciding to replace equipment. Program administrators are advised to check with their organization's legal counsel regarding the need and level at which to document equipment such as helmets, climbing ropes, harnesses, carabiners, and other items necessary to prevent serious injury or death. Figure 12.2 provides guidelines for developing policies and procedures for managing, maintaining, and replacing equipment.

Accurate Pretrip Participant Assessment

Administrators and program leaders must assess program participants to ensure desired program outcomes are being met. For an accurate assessment, staff must first obtain a clear perspective on the interests of potential participants. If interest is lacking in certain areas, it is unwise to put much energy into creating programs for those areas. A fantastic whitewater kayaking instructor, all the latest gear, and flashy trip advertising does not mean

that a whitewater kayaking trip will be successful. A program will not succeed when it fails to match the needs or desires of participants or does not effectively design policies, procedures, and guidelines to aid in the instructional and administrative process.

Figure 12.2 Guidelines for Developing Policies and Procedures for Equipment

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- Identify necessary equipment to purchase and consider equipment that may be rented from other programs or outfitters.
- Train staff on appropriate equipment use, care, maintenance, limitations, and life span. Always read and understand manufacturer recommendations.
- Inspect equipment on a regular basis both pretrip by trip leaders and posttrip by equipment room staff. Note irregularities or changes in condition. Immediately remove anything with unusual signs of wear and tear or damage.
- Use only UIAA- or CE-approved equipment for climbing and mountaineering, and in any situation when life relies directly on equipment.
- Organize, label, and store equipment to prevent loss or damage.
- Consider being consistent with type or style of equipment purchased to avoid confusion or

accidental misuse by staff or participants.

- Develop a culture that understands the need to inspect and report questionable equipment by providing easy access to damage report forms and examples of use.

Assessing the current needs and abilities of participants is vital to the success of the overall program and each individual trip. To quote a cliché, forewarned is forearmed. An excellent way of making initial participant assessments is in the form of a pretrip meeting. Meeting prior to the activity allows the instruction staff to gather pertinent information about participants (e.g., fitness level, prior experience, food preferences, allergies, expectations). The information gathered provides the leadership with the particulars to design a trip that fits the specific group.

In many cases, attending pretrip meetings is made mandatory by program policy because these meetings serve as opportunities to address expectations from both the program's and participant's perspective. Certain standards may be set by the administration to ensure that each pretrip meeting includes the same elements. For example, a policy may be written that each participant must sign a program assumption-of-risk waiver. The procedure for this may indicate that a staff member is to discuss the various

types of risk associated with participation in the particular trip. A guideline for this might include that a staff draw a Venn diagram to highlight how risk increases when multiple factors combine such as poor weather, broken equipment, and negative attitudes. In short, pretrip meeting policies help ensure that critical information is not overlooked.

Assessing appropriate levels of difficulty or commitment for trips is also important. For instance, an eight-day Grand Canyon backpacking trip over spring break is a popular option among collegiate outdoor programs. However appealing the trip might sound, it is crucial that the difficulty of a trip match the capabilities of the participants. Administrators must ask themselves realistic questions about the feasibility of specific trips during the planning stages, and trip leaders must continue the assessment process throughout their interaction with participants. Is hiking 45 miles in five days realistic? How do we portray the challenges of this trip accurately? Participant assessments do not end at the pretrip but must also happen in the field and at a trip's conclusion. Ultimately, the responsibility of matching programs to participants lies with the program administration. See figure 12.3 for suggestions on assessing participants.

Figure 12.3 Suggestions for Assessing Participants

- Design a universal comprehensive outline for pretrip meetings.
- Organize and execute thorough pretrip meetings highlighting trip intensity, hazards and risks, physical and mental requirements, and expectations of both participants and the program.
- Conduct regular check-ins with each participant to assess current level of enthusiasm, fatigue, and understanding.
- Ensure participants are properly hydrated and fed; this goes a long way toward preventing common ailments and preserving good expedition behavior.
- Use a trip evaluation form.

Staff Training

Quality program staff might be viewed as the greatest resource a program can offer its customers. Staff members are the direct link between a program's mission and the individuals who participate in the program. With such a vital role, staff must understand their responsibilities and carry out their duties with diligence and care. Before leading others in the field, all field staff must obtain levels of competency in an

activity and experience at the particular activity site or at venues that closely resemble the site (Petzoldt, 1974; Gookin and Leach, 2004; Nicolazzo, 2007). Minimum skill requirements for each activity must be clearly identified by the program and subsequently demonstrated by staff. In effect, this becomes program policy in the form of skill prerequisites for staff. All field staff trainings should concentrate on skill development and assessments of staff skills in the core areas of competency, as described in chapter 14. In creating a staff training process, Nicolazzo highlights the importance of ongoing training and mentoring coupled with developmentally supportive evaluations and feedback. He further suggests a need for supportive written material such as field manuals and program protocols that serve as accessible resources for ongoing staff development (Nicolazzo, 2007). Well-written policies, procedures, and guidelines complement staff trainings; the written material assists staff in recalling particular aspects of their training and in making responsible decisions.

Site-specific trainings are important for risk management and staff development.

Staff trainings should be designed to focus directly on an activity or an activity at a

particular site. Site-specific trainings should target essential information about particular locations, such as hazard evaluation, incident prevention and response, teaching progressions, and group facilitation strategies. The nature of the activity and venue dictates the level of competency required by staff.

Another topic concerning staff training is the role of certifications within a program's risk-management model and subsequent policies and procedures. A major benefit of certification-based trainings is that they commonly require the learner to demonstrate competence via written and practical hands-on examinations. Moreover, certifications from nationally recognized organizations may have the added value of training and testing individuals to a standard recognized by a panel of experts. Certifications provided by external organizations such as American Canoe Association, Center for Outdoor Ethics, American Institute for Avalanche Research and Education, or the American Mountain Guides Association are recognized throughout the outdoor industry for maintaining high curricular and teaching standards and for delivering quality products and services. The Wilderness First Responder (WFR) certification has become an industry standard for outdoor leaders working in remote locations. Programs offering frontcountry trips often elect to train their staff in Wilderness First

Aid (WFA) because of the proximity to urban emergency medical care. Determining specific certification expectations for staff is essential to developing policies and procedures manuals. In some programs, national certifications are not expected; site-specific trainings and internal competency measures are adequate. Other outdoor programs elect to use national certifications to augment internal and external training programs.

For example, an administrator who has completed a Leave No Trace Master Educator Course may have not only a deeper understanding of the application and teaching of environmental ethics but also be able to train staff members in the curriculum. By evaluating various strategies, philosophies, and techniques, administrators can decipher what may be in the best interest for their program. Inevitably, the decision to include professional training organizations in organizational policies and procedures is based on the program goals, internal staff competency, time constraints, and available human and fiscal resources. See figure 12.4 for recommendations on staff-training policies.

Feedback

Feedback is essential to effective management, improvement, and advancement of outdoor

programs. Many programs have simple policies in place requiring participant evaluations after a trip, but other considerations regarding feedback might improve the effectiveness of program components (e.g., staff trainings, incident prevention and response) and become standing policy. In the outdoor education paradigm, feedback is given for the purposes of improving performance and encouraging adaptive behaviors (Gookin and Leach, 2004). For outdoor leaders, feedback is a critical element of event processing and might assist in the development of judgment and competency (Petzoldt, 1974; Bandura, 1997). However, much of the current literature on feedback in outdoor education or outdoor leadership development has been vague in operationally defining the construct and, furthermore, lacks empirical support relative to actual outdoor applications (Gookin and Leach, 2004; Drury et al., 2005; Nicolazzo, 2007). Although feedback is successfully integrated into many programs, further research is needed to clarify and support effective feedback strategies.

Figure 12.4 Recommendations for Staff-Training Policies

- All staff must have learned and demonstrated a

minimum level of competency based on each position (trip leader, assistant leader, logistics coordinator, rental staff, etc.).

- Staff must be assessed prior to advancing into a new position or technical skill area.
- Programs should use a variety of evaluative methods to assess staff skills, including participant evaluations, peer evaluations, and professional observation.
- Site-specific training is appropriate for training specific skills in specific areas and may be a required aspect of staff advancement.
- Supportive resources should be made easily accessible for field staff, including policies, procedures, and guideline manuals, course area guides, etc.
- Specific certification expectations may be a part of the policy choices made by administrators when training or advancing staff.

Before discussing the development of feedback policies we should take a closer look at the construct. For our purposes, *feedback* can be understood essentially as the information a person is confronted with during or after any experience wherein the self is directly or vicariously involved (Howell, 2009). The source of feedback could be the product of an event or particular behavior, the articulated perspective of another person on an event or behavior, or a

by-product of self-reflection. Categorizing feedback into inherent and extrinsic sources provides a further distinction. Feedback inherent in an activity has been shown to be a catalyst for learning through self-regulatory processes (Zimmerman and Kitsantas, 1997). For example, a strong eddy line can provide immediate inherent feedback to a novice kayaker who is learning the technique of how to exit a river eddy. Extrinsic sources such as verbal instruction, modeling, and correction can support inherent feedback. If the novice kayaker is flipped by the current, the instructor, an extrinsic source, can verbally walk her through why she flipped and demonstrate the technique needed for success on the next attempt. Much attention in the literature has been given to extrinsic feedback sources such as instructors and peers and the potential effects on learning (Rosenshine and Stevens, 1986; Elliott and Dweck, 1988; Schunk, 1983; Bandura, 1997). Additional research may provide insight into how both inherent and external sources of feedback can be used by program administrators.

In general, feedback from program administrators has two related but separate approaches: (1) to reinforce successful actions or (2) to assist a learner in becoming successful, if difficulty or failure to meet a standard is experienced. Either approach should include information that stimulates a conscious critical

review of a person's actions. This critical review is invaluable to meaningful learning because it allows one to relive or mentally reconstruct the actions or events and to consciously process the reasons for the result (Bandura, 1997; Narciss, 2004). If feedback is specific and includes information that details perceived causes, the recipient now has reinforcement for his own perceptions or new information with which he can evaluate its relation to his performance. Thus, the process is emphasized more than the performance. This emphasis on process encourages deeper understanding of the actions or strategies that lead to success. Also, focusing on the process discourages maladaptive behaviors, such as attributions to ability in the case of a failure or assuming competence after a single positive outcome (Weiner, 1986).

Some important factors increase the potential for feedback to be accepted and assessed by an individual. The provider must be viewed as credible and believed to have the welfare of the recipient in mind (Bandura, 1997). Here, efforts of healthy relationship development among program administrators and staff help facilitate the receptivity of feedback. Staff members are also more prone to valuing feedback if the one giving the feedback is seen as competent and offering information that helps the staff member in pursuit of her goals. The content must be something the individual has control over, such

as a choice of strategy or equipment, attitude, or effort. Last, the more proximal the feedback to the event, the more likely the details will be clear for both the giver and receiver. See figure 12.5 for recommendations for giving feedback.

Program Progressions

A successful outdoor program effectively integrates outdoor, human, educational, and management skills into all aspects of the program. Fundamentally, a program progression is an educationally oriented framework that refers to how individual components of a course, activity, skill, or set of skills are purposefully sequenced with regard to learning objectives (Nicolazzo, 2007). Practically, however, program progressions are the educational structures created within an organization to minimize risk, maximize skill development, and provide a positive experience. Progressions within each activity or training should be carefully designed to maximize development for staff and participants alike. Programs should have basic policies in place to review and examine course progressions on a regular basis; staff should be responsible for correctly and appropriately applying approved course progressions while in the field.

Figure 12.5 Recommendations for Giving Feedback

Policy Recommendations

- Consider asking participants to fill out an evaluation after every trip.
- Consider implementing a staff or peer-to-peer evaluation process as part of the postcourse review.
- Consider staff retreats to bring the community together for feedback and planning sessions.
- Use feedback to reinforce, document, or alter staff behavior, trip designs, or other variations in program design.

General Feedback Applications

- Encourage personal growth and leadership skills.
- Assist with learning *why* something happened the way it did.
- Maintain an open and honest program through mutual respect and humility.
- Develop and cultivate a community that values meaningful learning.
- Improve the program.

New outdoor skills are learned through well-designed learning progressions that include relating new information to prior knowledge and experience, modeling, practice, and feedback on

performance accuracy. Attention to logical sequencing helps learners cognitively organize new information aiding retention and ease of learning. At the macro level, creating effective outdoor skill progressions requires administrators to be adept in educational theory and application. The nature of the majority of outdoor skills necessitates understanding of cognitive motor skill development and the implications of effective and ineffective modeling of desired behaviors.

Additionally, in various situations, administrators might encounter misconceptions held by staff or participants regarding outdoor skills. Research in constructivist theory suggests that people actively try to relate new information to what they already know (Schunk, 2008). Given that people are constantly processing and storing information into an active and creative mind, it is possible that some of that information will be inaccurate when processed, stored, and applied. Misconceptions arise in many ways but often manifest during communications in the form of misunderstandings caused by language barriers, incomplete information, failed demonstrations, poor modeling, or inaccurate perceptions. These misconceptions can lead to the creation of false beliefs and rationalizations of thought and action. One example is in teaching aspects of the Leave No Trace principles. Some people may believe that it is OK to disturb or even remove

Native American artifacts from public lands; however, it is strictly prohibited by federal law. When encountering misconceptions, it is important to understand that they are often deeply rooted and might resist change.

This relates to policy creation because many policies are created with positive intentions but may be flawed in design because they are rooted in misconceptions, institutional precedence, or inaccurate data. An example includes a historically used but now outdated policy that requires a climber to tie a double-fisherman's knot above a rewoven figure-eight knot. This policy was common throughout the industry for years when climbers used a bowline knot to tie in. As the industry evolved, and the rewoven figure-eight knot became the standard knot for tying into a rope, the logic of the time inaccurately assumed that a rewoven figure-eight knot would, like a bowline, become loose and possibly untied.

Evidence now demonstrates that the double-fisherman "back-up" knot is unnecessary behind a properly tied rewoven figure-eight knot because it is, by design, a self-tightening knot. Now, even though literature written by international climbing organizations and manufacturers no longer advocates the use of the double-fisherman's knot, many organizations have continued the historic practice of tying "back-up knots." An understanding and prudent

program administrator will continually and thoroughly investigate current industry practices when creating, reviewing, or adjusting policies and procedures.

As mentioned, program progressions are educational structures that guide an organization in executing effective risk management, offering positive skill-development experiences for participants. At times, administrators may require staff to develop course progressions and demonstrate that they meet the outcomes expressed by course marketing.

Program and Policy Adaptations and Improvements

Recognizing the need for change may be harder than you think. Proactive administrators are those who continually seek ways in which to improve trips, be more effective with staff trainings, and meet the varying interests of participants. What's more, evaluation of the actual implementation of risk-management strategies and their effectiveness in specific contexts is of the utmost importance to developing a successful program. Supporting a culture of open dialogue among administrative staff, management, and field staff can facilitate regular evaluations of the various aspects of the program. Evaluations vary in formality and in

depth of detail, from trip debriefings to external reviews by professional organizations. Nevertheless, it is critical that in-depth evaluations be regularly conducted to better understand the actuality of program elements, anticipate potential vulnerabilities, and maintain healthy momentum within the organization.

Programs evolve or programs dissolve. Over time, inevitable shifts occur in leadership, finances, philosophy, competency, clientele, and so on; these shifts affect the emphasis or overall structure of a program. Typically, administrators are keen to spot potential problems, but subtle shifts in participation levels or competencies of staff can be less noticeable, especially in large programs (Ajango, 2000). Recognizing current levels of staff competency might indicate a need to shift certain programming to more accurately align with current staff capabilities. Not offering a trip to a popular vertical cave because current caving staff have not demonstrated the educational skill proficiencies to teach others efficient ascending techniques is a tough but common type of decision. Many programs have high turnover rates for staff that can inhibit judgment development of junior staff caused by a lower level of field time, mentoring, and evaluation by administrators or senior staff. Moreover, changes in program administration also bring changes in expertise, subsequent training progressions, and supervision of field

staff.

Along with staff assessments (see <u>chapter 15</u>), trip debriefs offer opportunities to find strengths and weaknesses within a program. Trip debriefings help administrators look critically at the status of the organization and its programs from the perspective of those leading in the field. Designing a procedure for debriefing trips can create opportunities for these assessments. The atmosphere created by the administration and internal relationships might dictate the candidness of feedback during these sessions. Loyalty to the program and mutual trust are important factors that must not be overlooked. Each of these components of program evaluation serve as a launch pad for determining the current status of programming. Overtime, near-misses and minor incidents can lead to a change in policy for curriculum, program progression, or group management. For example, a few near-misses while boiling water or a singular partial-thickness burn in the backcountry could be cause for the administrator to implement a curriculum policy change to prevent further burn-related incidents. A curriculum change notice to members of an outdoor program field staff could look something like this: (1) soft tissue injuries in camp and around the kitchen are common; (2) kitchen safety talks given by field staff to participants have been proven effective at other programs to

reduce burns, cuts, and soft tissue injuries; (3) therefore, the following new policy has been instated:

Policy

- A safety talk must be included the first time new participants use a stove, eat communal food, or stand near a fire.

Procedures

- All participants must be present.
- Content should be specific to the immediate topic (i.e., safe stove use, kitchen management, knife use, etc.).

Guidelines: Kitchen Safety Talk Outline for Trip Leaders

- Cover stove use and care (white gas or propane).
- Encourage use of dipper cups to avoid spilling large pots of water.
- Don't lift or pass hot pots or pans over body parts.
- Do not step over a stove that is lit.
- Do not sit when cooking; remain in an active position around stoves to be able to move in the event of a spill.
- Have people set cups and bowls down on a flat surface and then fill them with hot substances.
- Use thin metal spatulas and encourage cooks

to cut cheese and other soft items with these "dull but effective" tools.

- Don't cut objects in hand. Use cutting boards (and always cut downward).
- Discourage whittling of wood.

DEVELOPING ADMINIS-TRATIVE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

In this text, administrative policy, procedures, and guidelines refer to the administrative practices of staff working in a facility such as an office or rental center. In short, administrative policies and procedures govern what happens in the office. Facilities such as climbing walls and challenge courses often represent a blend of administrative policies, field policies, incident-prevention policies, and incident-response policies. In general, well-written administrative policies contribute to the consistency of day-to-day operations carried out by staff members. Because program objectives drive the formulation of these policies, careful attention should be given to the means through which the objectives can be met. Also, concise clarity of language promotes accurate understanding of the administration's intention. When drafting administrative policies,

procedures, and guidelines, use the who, what, when, where, why, and how formula to promote thorough understanding among all staff.

Ranging from instruction manuals on how to use the computerized rental system to customer service expectations, administrative policies and procedures can be extensive because of the vast array of specialized duties expected of hourly staff. Many outdoor programs use hourly staff to aid with trip registrations, equipment rentals, special events, and customer relations. Because the hourly staff must know how to explain equipment to customers and answer trip questions, field staff trainings might be of benefit to them as well. If hourly staff cannot participate in field staff trainings, then, at a minimum, extensive office-based operational trainings should supplement and support the written administrative policies, procedures, and guidelines.

DEVELOPING FIELD POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Field policies are generally divided into two categories: *incident prevention* and *incident response.* Because of the variable nature of outdoor program trips, incident-prevention policies rely heavily on procedures in contexts in

which the risk is too high to allow for individual interpretation to enforce a policy, and guidelines are used in contexts that will vary based on environmental conditions and staff experience. Curtis (2002) notes that staff competence levels create a balancing act for the outdoor program administrator. As staff competence increases and sound decision-making abilities are demonstrated by quality judgments, prescribed policies and procedures often decrease and, in many cases, morph into a series of effective guidelines. However, it is important to recognize that because staff competence varies, affecting decision-making capabilities, context-specific written policies without responsible trip design and staff training will not effectively address risk management. Figure 12.6 represents the relation of staff competence and the need for protocols. Prescribed policies and procedures are necessary in cases in which staff experience and judgment are low. As judgment increases, procedures may morph into guidelines.

As indicated in figure 12.6, some policies are essential to maintain program consistency, whereas the need for more procedures (versus guidelines) depends on staff competency. Incident-prevention and incident-response policies will vary in that incident-response policies are quite prescriptive, whereas incident prevention may be either procedural or guideline based, depending on context.

Incident Prevention

It cannot be stressed enough that developing policies, procedures, and guidelines in conjunction with effective staff training is essential to preventing incidents in the field. Begin with creating policies for what documentation needs to be completed prior to leaving for a trip, and finish with strategies for how to keep the group safe in the field. Well-written policies coupled with a staff well informed and trained in the application of polices will help reduce exposure to legal liability. Thus field policies, procedures, and guidelines should be based on due diligence, best practices, and training. For this reason alone, the policies, procedures, and guidelines should supplement ample staff training on incident prevention, and policies should not exceed what is necessary. When developing incident-prevention strategies, the three main policy areas to be considered are pretrip, trip, and posttrip.

Decision Making in the Field

(High) - Paraprofessional

Low judgment
High protocols

High judgment
High protocols

Protocols Control Decisions

Low judgment
Low protocols

High judgment
Low protocols

(Low) ← Judgment Controls Decisions → (High)
Professional

| Low | Moderate | High |

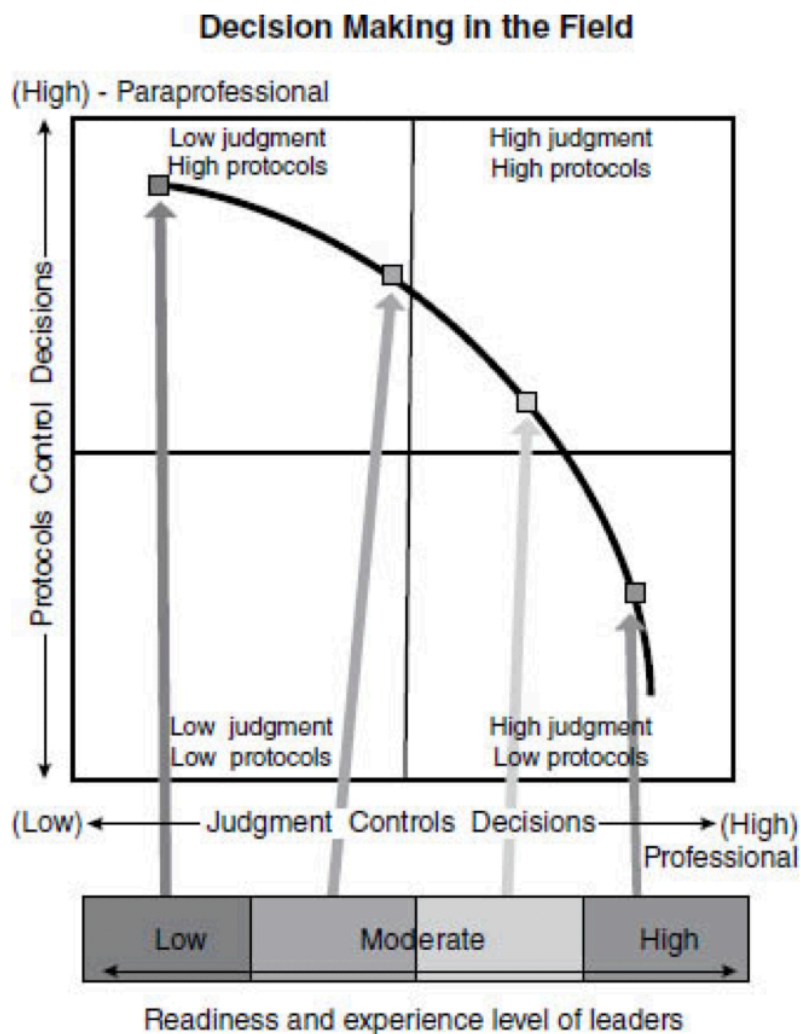Readiness and experience level of leaders

Figure 12.6 Decision-making protocol.

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Pretrip Policies

Many organizations require all participants to attend a pretrip meeting for any trips offered by the program. Pretrip meetings generally cover

the logistics, itinerary, equipment, risks, expectations, and relevant participant policies. Other organizations find other ways to deliver the information through printed literature or electronic media. Regardless of the way the information is provided, policies and procedures for what will be provided to participants should be established to maintain consistency of service.

Expectations from the leadership range from acceptable behaviors and attitudes to what equipment or personal items participants are required to supply for themselves. From the participant's point of view, expectations about the nature of the trip—location; level of physical demands; required personal equipment; transportation options; and type, quantity, and quality of meals—are often priorities. For trips in which the program supplies meals, food preferences may even be dictated by variables such as physical limitations from allergies, strong personal convictions such as vegetarianism, and religious beliefs. Finally, having knowledge of the interests, expectations, and capabilities of each participant allows the leader to better design and adapt a trip around the needs of the group. Clearly informing participants of the nature of the activities and dangers involved is the explicit responsibility of the program leadership, including administration, marketing, office staff, and trip staff.

Some pretrip meetings center risk discussions

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Some pretrip meetings center risk discussions

around the concept of *causative risk* (Paulcke and Dumler, 1973). Causative risk arises through a combination of uncontrollable and controllable elements that create an increase in potential for incidents, injury, or death. Each pretrip meeting informs participants that each trip includes uncontrollable factors or objective hazards such as moving water, weather, rock fall, wildlife, and terrain difficulty, just to name a few. In addition, there are factors over which each person is able to execute some level of control and are thus categorized as subjective hazards. Independently, these hazards simply exist or potentially exist. Regardless of particular form, if subjective and objective hazards are not effectively managed, the consequence is causative risk. Causative risk occurs when subjective hazards are inadequately managed or ignored or an increase in objective hazards occurs that exceed the ability of trip leaders to effectively manage. Unchecked, causative risks may lead to dangerous situations. Incidents or accidents do not just happen. Figure 12.7 provides an example of policies and procedures associated with pretrip meetings, which should include discussion of associated risks.

Trip Policies and Procedures

Trip policies, procedures, and guidelines can be divided into frontcountry and backcountry

categories of programming. Frontcountry includes anything that happens to or from a backcountry trip or course, and might involve vehicle travel. Many parent organizations have policies and procedures already in place, and the outdoor program administrator may only need to make a few adaptations to ensure the outdoor program is in alignment with the larger entity. However, additional training for special topics such as vehicle loading and trailer loading and use might be needed. Backcountry includes anything that occurs while in the field. This includes policies for river management, backpacking, sea kayaking, caving, rock climbing, and more.

Figure 12.7 Pretrip Meeting Policies

Policy

- All trips must have a pretrip meeting; participants must attend, and trip leaders facilitate it.

Policy

- All participants must sign an assumption-of-risk form and medical screening document at the pretrip meeting.

Procedures

- Start with introductions, so leaders and participants

learn each other's names.

- Cover in detail what participants can expect— itinerary, menu items, and transportation.
- Cover the equipment list and provide a written list for participants.
- Discuss outdoor program policies and procedures.
- Discuss creating a positive learning environment.
- Address appropriate language, behaviors, and what constitutes harassment.
- Discuss both potential objective hazards and subjective hazards and ways to mitigate them to avoid causative risk.
- Discuss prohibited items such as alcohol and recreational drugs and consequences of bringing them on the trip.
- Discuss risk and trip paperwork; assumption-of-risk and medical forms need to be signed by participants.

Guidelines

- Rehearse the meeting so that the leadership team is organized and each leader has a role.
- Consider the meeting format ideas below.

Introductions

- Consider using a name game or icebreaker.
- Consider asking for more information than just a name, such as why they came on the trip.

Define what participants should expect.

- Consider providing a supplemental handout (in

addition to registration paperwork) with as much detail as possible about the itinerary.

- Define what equipment is provided and what equipment participants need to provide.
- Leaders should consider bringing everything on the list and laying it out for participants to see.
- The more information provided, the better the experience is for participants.
- Have a positive learning environment discussion. Get people to share how they like to be treated and types of behaviors they don't want to see in the group. Most organizations do a good job looking out for people's physical well-being, but attention also needs to be paid to ensuring emotional well-being by creating a positive, comfortable environment free from harassment of all forms.

Draw the Causative Risk Model

- Have the group assist in identifying both subjective and objective factors that could be encountered on the trip.

Closure

- Consider one more energizing activity to set the tone for the trip.
- Consider staying after the meeting to provide a forum for individual questions.

Trip policies, procedures, and guidelines need to provide a framework for staff to make

decisions; they also must provide authorization for staff to use their judgment on the application of policies, procedures, and guidelines when appropriate. Figure 12.8 is a list of topics that an administrator might include in a policy manual for trip policies.

Designing trip policies and procedures is especially important because regional differences, program offerings, and staff competence vary dramatically across programs. Although some policies might be consistent, such as on campfires in relation to Leave No Trace principles, others might be completely different for a host of reasons. It is imperative that outdoor program administrators write original policies for the program being managed. This can be accomplished by using all available resources, including policies, procedures, and guidelines from similar organizations, and then adapting the resources to fit the unique variables of the program.

Posttrip Policies

Posttrip policies, procedures, and guidelines include aspects such as finishing participant evaluations, staff and peer evaluations, trip summary, submitting incident paperwork (patient SOAP notes, incident reporting forms, near-miss forms, etc.), equipment return and repairs, vehicle cleaning, returning a cash

advance, possibly participating in a trip debrief, and other pertinent details regarding a trip's closure. As with pretrip policies, wrapping up a trip is likely to be very procedural in nature. This is especially true for vehicle management, equipment management, and cash advances. Any damages to equipment or a vehicle need to be reported immediately so that repairs can take place before the next time the equipment or vehicle is to be used. Especially in outdoor programs located in larger institutions, cash advances have specific policies and procedures, and rarely have extensive guidelines. Following is an example of a cash advance posttrip policy and procedure:

Policy

- The trip leader is responsible for accounting for all funds from a cash advance.

Procedure

On returning from a trip, the following items must be returned on the next business day:

1. Cash-advance accounting form
2. Itemized receipts for all purchases made on the trip
3. Remaining funds from the cash advance

In summary, policies, procedures, and guidelines for incident prevention need to be written so that all staff are able and willing to

follow them. This often means the administration should purposely seek staff involvement in writing or reviewing policy manuals to provide opportunities for questions, create buy-in, and make revisions as necessary. Well-written policy manuals emphasizing incident prevention can reduce the number of accidents, but because of inherent risk of outdoor activities, accidents will still occur. Thus a well-designed, rehearsed, and prepared incident-response plan needs to be a part of all outdoor program policy manuals.

Incident Response

The amount of work that goes into preventing incidents in this field is astounding. Yet even a well-designed and managed program will occasionally have incidents occur. Incidents need to be managed appropriately from start to finish to ensure the most positive outcome possible. All the work that goes into establishing policies and procedures, training standards, and equipment maintenance and inspections is essential. However, creating a comprehensive incident-response plan is equally as important. An incident-response plan is commonly defined as a comprehensive set of policies and procedures enacted in the event of a serious injury or illness or fatality associated with a sponsored activity. However, each incident will vary based on the situation, injury, location of the group, and

severity, so an incident-response plan needs to allow for flexibility within its procedural aspects. Thus an incident-response plan is the "map" for an organization's initial response to an emergency. Effective staff training, predetermined evacuation routes, contacts, and communication strategies are essential to an incident-response plan.

Figure 12.8 List of Topics That an Administrator Might Include in a Policy Manual for Trip Policies

Frontcountry

- Alcohol and drug-use policy
- Driving policies
- Appropriate vehicle use
- Appropriate trailer use
- Groups in cities or towns
- Motel or urban camping (KOA)
- Harassment policy or PLE

Backcountry

- First aid
- Lost or separated
- Search and rescue
- Leave no trace
- Campsite selection
- Hygiene and sanitation

- Footwear use
- Blister prevention and feet care
- Lightning
- Food storage
- Water filtration or purification
- Equipment use
- Discipline-specific expectations
- Climbing
- Caving
- Skiing
- Rafting
- Whitewater kayaking
- Sea kayaking
- Canoeing
- Cooking and kitchen safety talk

Provide Appropriate Treatment

The initial incident requires the trip leadership team to act quickly to provide any appropriate treatment required for the person or persons injured. Generally speaking, field treatment is limited to a combination of three options:

1. Remove the participant from the hazard.
2. Administer appropriate first aid.
3. Determine if an evacuation is necessary; facilitate if needed.

Providing appropriate treatment is the

responsibility of the staff in the field; thus an outdoor program administrator should have a detailed assessment of staff training, abilities, and competency. Initiating an emergency evacuation for a sprained ankle, or remaining oblivious to the signs of heat exhaustion, are examples of mismanaged problems in the field. Appropriate wilderness medical training for staff is essential for effective field treatment. In essence, the administrator is responsible for sending appropriate staff into the field, and should not knowingly send incompetent staff into the field. Further, programs should have a medical director, and staff should be operating under protocols authorized by the medical director. Most wilderness medicine providers will help program administrators with developing protocol in alignment with the level of staff training (WFA, WFR, WEMT). An extremely useful, and descriptive SOAP (subjective, objective assessment plan) has been provided by the Wilderness Medicine Training Center (see figure 12.9). It is important to create a clear document that instructs staff on what to do and who they should contact in the event of an emergency incident.

Communication Devices

Evacuation is one of the three treatment options available in the field. Cell phones, satellite

phones, personal locating beacons, or two-way radios are usually carried to aid in the evacuation process. Participants might also expect that some form of communication in the field is available (if this is not the case, the issue needs to be discussed as a part of the incident-prevention plan). Creating a clear response plan for the use of cell phones is necessary. Cell phones are routed through towers, and depending on the location of the cell tower, 911 dispatch may be located in another state. Thus best practices might dictate using direct phone numbers for the emergency response teams most likely to respond (e.g., county sheriff's office). Each trip location should have local emergency contact numbers included in the emergency response plan customized for that area.

Staff practicing throw-bag rescues during a raft guide school.

Evacuation Routes

Many short trips have straightforward evacuation routes because the vehicle is close, but on longer trips covering larger distances you might find that a trailhead to the north, south, east, or west is closer than the trip's origination point. Consequently, prior to going in the field, the administrator should work with field staff to

predetermine extraction points throughout the trip's expected course. This will be an essential component of an effective emergency response if the evacuation takes place via a new extraction point.

Determining Emergency Contacts and Responsibilities

To start, the outdoor program administrator must determine who will be contacted in the event of an emergency. The administrator must work with those people in the organization, whether military, college, parks and recreation, or otherwise, to determine who the necessary people are in the emergency contact list. Additionally, determining an incident commander who is responsible for assessing the incident, coordinating the parties involved in the emergency, and disseminating information to relevant stakeholders is necessary. In many cases, the incident commander might change based on who is currently available or who is best suited to manage the particular circumstances. Thus effectively training anyone who is expected to act as an incident commander in the event of an emergency is essential to efficient and careful execution according to organizational policies.

Figure 12.9 Wilderness Medicine Training Center SOAP note.

Courtesy of the Wilderness Medicine Training Center.

Many organizations use existing management structures to create an incident-response plan. This might work if the incident-response plan is clear to all members. Often, outdoor programs will unknowingly operate in a vacuum and implement incident-response plans without

educating, training, or regularly reviewing and updating the plan with all relevant members of the response plan. Figure 12.10 shows a common emergency response diagram indicating the director of a university ll relevant members of the response plan. Figure 12.10 shows a common emergency response diagram indicating the director of a university recreation department as the center of operations. This type of hierarchical chain may not be the most effective, and many times, is not what is used in dedicated outdoor programs, such as NOLS or smaller nonprofits. However, outdoor program administrators working in large institutional organizations need to effectively educate superiors on the importance of this response plan.

As shown in figure 12.10, a number of roles must be established to maintain an organized and coordinated approach to managing an emergency. Generally, the outdoor program administrator is the person responsible for coordinating all field-related efforts. This is especially true in large organizations because the administrator may be the only person who is extensively familiar with the exact trip location, itinerary, and evacuation plans. In other organizations solely devoted to outdoor education, the administrator position is commonly referred to as a field coordinator. The field coordinator is responsible for coordinating rescue efforts and making personnel decisions

with regard to sending additional staff into the field to support the trip after the incident.
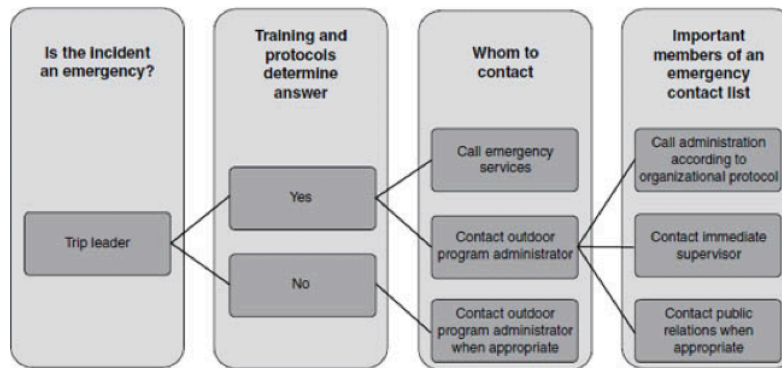

Figure 12.10 A common emergency response diagram of a university outdoor program.

It is often essential to have another person responsible for gathering reports, statements, and field documentation from those involved in the situation. Generally, it is best to assign a person to this role who is able to solely focus on this responsibility. A documentation coordinator should have a detailed understanding of what to collect and how to collect the information. Figure 12.11 includes a list of important information that needs to be collected during the process of managing the emergency. This person may or may not be an outdoor professional.

Postincident Debrief

The impact of a serious incident on the victim, other participants, and both field and

organizational staff can be severe. The organization should provide ample assistance for each member of the group to ensure mental emotional security. A *critical incident stress debriefing* (CISD) should occur 24 to 72 hours after an incident; this debriefing should include anyone involved in the incident. CISDs are designed to help with initial processing of a stressful event, such as a severe injury or death, and might involve a professional counselor. But initial CISDs are often not enough, and outdoor programs should have a plan for critical incident counselors to be available for participants for at least several days after the incident.

Figure 12.11 Important Information to Be Collected While Managing an Emergency

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- Name of the person(s) involved in the incident
- Names of the persons on the trip but not involved in the incident
- Subjective and objective information as detailed on the SOAP note
- Detailed assessment and treatment plan as detailed on the SOAP of the patient
- Trip leader's description of the incident
- Assistant leader's description of the incident
- Witnesses' or other participants' descriptions of the

incident

- Details of specific requests from field staff for support
- Evacuation techniques and route
- UTM coordinates
- Check-in times between incident coordinator (outdoor program administrator) and field staff

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COMMUNICATING WITH THE MEDIA

For serious incidents, the media will expect information about the circumstances, decisions, and staff involved to be provided by the organization very quickly. Using an existing public relations department for all contact with the media is an excellent option. Encourage all members of the incident-response team to defer questions to those responsible for communicating with the media. During an incident, the most important focus is on the injured person's care and rescue. The following is a list of dos and don'ts when communicating with the media.

Dos

- Through press releases and interviews, provide the media with as much factual information as

possible.

- Address the media in a straightforward manner, addressing only the facts of the situation.
- Prepare a script and press-release prior to engaging in an interview.
- Prepare information about the organization, its history, it operations, and its mission prior to meeting with the press.
- Express that an accident has occurred, and that emergency protocols have been enacted.
- Explain why certain information cannot be released, such as notification of next of kin, legal considerations with an ongoing investigation, safety of injured patients, and respect for those involved.
- Provide factual information such as where, what, and when something happened.
- Express concern for the injured party, the family, and the participants still involved. Indicate if the program director or organization representative is involved in meeting with those involved.

Don'ts

- Do not deny the press an opportunity to ask questions.
- Do not engage in speculation about why an incident has occurred.
- Do not give names of injured parties until next of kin have been notified.
- Do not provide information pertinent to an ongoing

criminal or civil investigation.

SUMMARY

Proper planning and practice prevents incidents. Developing policies, procedures, and guidelines is an essential step to developing a professional outdoor program that provides enjoyable experiences to participants. It is essential that policies, procedures, and guidelines be used in conjunction with staff hiring, minimum training standards (e.g., required certifications), and assessment methods (see chapter 15). However, even the most effective incident-prevention plan cannot always prevent an accident. Risk can be managed and mitigated but not entirely removed. A detailed incident-response plan must be in place to ensure that the injured party is cared for, that staff maintain a controlled environment, that participants are supported through the experience, and that the program is able to effectively manage the incident. Overall, developing policies, procedures, and guidelines is time consuming but essential to effective outdoor program administration.